

**CITY OF BETHLEHEM**  
**ELM STREET PLAN**  
**FOR**  
**NORTH AND WEST SIDE**  
**NEIGHBORHOODS**

*November 2005*

**Prepared by:**  
**Urban Research & Development Corporation**  
**Bethlehem, Pennsylvania**

**CITY OF BETHLEHEM ELM STREET PLAN FOR NORTH AND WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS**  
**BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Geographic Setting and History

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania's seventh largest city, is located in the east-central portion of the Commonwealth. Together with Allentown, Easton, and other communities, Bethlehem is part of the Lehigh Valley, the third largest metropolitan area in the State. Bethlehem occupies portions of both Lehigh and Northampton Counties at the confluence of the Monocacy Creek and the Lehigh River. Major American cities are not far away, with Philadelphia 60 miles to the south, and New York City 80 miles to the east. U.S. Route 22 and Interstate 78, both multi-lane limited-access highways, serve as important transportation routes to and from Bethlehem, and also approximate the northern and southern boundaries of the City. State Route 378, a north-south freeway, provides direct access to Bethlehem's Center City area. Bethlehem occupies 19 square miles and is home to more than 71,000 people.

Bethlehem began as a Moravian religious settlement along the Monocacy Creek in 1741. Even in this early period, Bethlehem was a center of industrial activity. Water-powered mills and smith shops formed a major industrial center in a primarily agricultural valley. Bethlehem grew in the mid-1800's as a major stop on the Lehigh Navigation Canal linking Northeastern Pennsylvania coal fields with Philadelphia. Bethlehem's true industrial fame, however, arrived with Bethlehem Steel, which from the 1880's through the end of the 20th century, produced a major share of the world's structural steel.

The neighborhoods under study in this Elm Street Plan owe their existence largely to the City's industrial history. Steel barons and blue-collar workers alike made their homes on the grids of streets which emanate outward from the original Moravian Quarter. The focus of this Plan is Bethlehem's North and West Side neighborhoods which lie adjacent to the City's North Side Central Business District. The "Study Area", as it is called in this report, is defined on the west by the border shared with the City of Allentown, on the east by Stefko Boulevard, on the north by Elizabeth Avenue, Route 378 and Eaton Avenue, and on the south by the Lehigh River. Its exact boundaries are defined by Year 2000 U.S. Census block groups. Map 1 shows the Study Area's regional location, while Map 2 provides a more detailed look at the Study Area and its constituent Census block groups and neighborhoods.

Later in this Elm Street Plan report, a smaller "Target District" is identified within the Study Area, inside which a majority of the Plan recommendations are focused. This Target District also delineates where Elm Street Program funds will be used.

## **The Pennsylvania Elm Street Program**

Pennsylvania's Elm Street Program assists municipalities in rejuvenating residential and mixed-use areas adjacent to their central business districts. Within these neighborhoods, the goals of the Elm Street Program are:

- To improve physical appearances by enhancing exterior building conditions and the local streetscape;
- To connect with revitalization activities happening in nearby commercial areas;
- To create and sustain neighborhood organizations that will help prevent decline; and
- To devise a vision for neighborhood revitalization and a comprehensive strategy to carry out that vision.

Central commercial areas and the neighborhoods that surround them are linked. Vibrant neighborhoods provide customers and a labor pool for downtown businesses. In turn, a healthy downtown improves the quality of life in nearby neighborhoods. The idea behind the Elm Street Program is that communities should plan the future of these two types of areas together, instead of treating them like separate entities.

The Pennsylvania Elm Street Program provides three types of state grants to municipalities:

- Planning Grants to prepare five-year revitalization strategies;
- Operational grants for hiring a professional Elm Street Manager to oversee implementation of the five-year strategy; and
- Reinvestment grants to fund physical improvements recommended in the five-year strategy.

Pennsylvania based its Elm Street Program on its successful Main Street Program, which targets downtown commercial districts. Both the Main Street Program and the Elm Street Program stress planning and organization prior to “bricks and mortar” improvement projects. The City of Bethlehem strongly endorses this approach for its North and West Side neighborhoods.

The methodology in this particular Elm Street Plan is as follows:

1. Study the assets and constraints of the aforementioned Study Area.
2. Determine which portions of the Study Area are most in need, and which also qualify for aid under the State's Elm Street Program.
3. Delineate an Elm Street Target District based on those findings.
4. Develop goals, objectives, recommendations, and implementation techniques primarily for the Target District, but also for the larger Study Area.

## **Elements of the Elm Street Plan**

This Elm Street Plan identifies goals and concepts for neighborhood revitalization. The public and private actions needed to make these concepts a reality are then described. Following this Introduction, the Bethlehem Elm Street Plan for North and West Side Neighborhoods has five major chapters:

- I. Existing Assets and Constraints
- II. Goals
- III. Recommendations
- IV. Implementation
- V. Appendices

### **I. Existing Assets and Constraints**

This initial section of the plan is a status report on existing trends and conditions in several subject areas. The assets and constraints most likely to influence the future of the Study Area neighborhoods are identified.

### **II. Goals**

This section describes the City's vision for the future revitalization of the Study Area. The goals identify what the City hopes to accomplish by devoting time, money and organizational resources to neighborhood revitalization.

### **III. Recommendations**

The recommendations describe the physical improvements and other actions the City and others should take to realize the revitalization goals identified. This chapter also delineates the Elm Street Target District. It is within the boundaries of this District where State Elm Street Program funds will be put to work. This Plan does, however, include recommendations for areas outside the Target District (but within the larger Study Area), which will be funded with other programs.

### **IV. Implementation**

More than goals and recommendations are needed for revitalization to succeed. The Implementation section of the plan is a step-by-step approach to organizing, funding and carrying out the plan's goals and recommendations. This section describes which recommendations should be priorities, who should be responsible for ensuring the recommendations are carried out, and where the necessary funding should come from.

### **Appendices**

The Appendices provide important supporting data and related background information including demographic data and a description of how the City incorporated public input into this plan.

## **Relation to Other City Plans and Policies**

The City of Bethlehem is proactive in the areas of land use and community planning, with a commitment to preserving and enhancing the quality of life throughout the City. Four planning efforts have particular relevance to this Elm Street Plan, and are described below.

### **Bethlehem Vision Comprehensive Plan (1991)**

The City's most recent comprehensive plan provides a vision for the future of Bethlehem. Under the plan, the overall goal of improving the quality of life for all citizens must be met by reinforcing strong and stable neighborhoods, improving and revitalizing existing development, and encouraging new growth potential in the form of renovation, infill and selective new development. The plan outlines various strategies for neighborhood revitalization that can be undertaken by the city to complement the work being done to strengthen downtown Bethlehem. While some of the strategies outlined in the plan have been successfully implemented, many are ongoing.

Recommendations of the Vision Comprehensive Plan which correlate with the Elm Street Program include the following:

- Enhance and maintain Bethlehem's visual image by creating gateways into the city
- Create neighborhood centers
- Preserve existing housing stock
- Promote the development of a range of housing options to meet future needs
- Remove institutional and regulatory barriers to affordable housing
- Establish and improve pedestrian and bicycle linkages throughout the city
- Find ways to improve the park system by creating additional open space in the city

### **Land Use and Conditions Reports (2000 and 2002)**

Land Use and Conditions reports were prepared for certain sections of Bethlehem's North Side to qualify these areas for federal Community Development Block Grant program funding. The neighborhoods' characteristics must match the definitions of a slum or area of blight, as defined by the Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Act of 1945. The report can then be used as the basis for any redevelopment proposals. Studied areas included the following mixed-use corridors and districts:

- West Broad Street from Terrace Avenue to Club Avenue
- East Broad Street from Stefko Boulevard to Center Street
- Linden Street from Elizabeth Avenue to East Broad Street
- North Side Central Business District (bounded by Monocacy Creek, Goepp Street, Center Street, and the Lehigh River)

In the first three study areas, the reports noted a deterioration of neighborhood aesthetics, including sub-standard building conditions, neglected sidewalks, sporadically-placed businesses, litter and debris, and excessive or unattractive signage. These three corridors, which are the backbones of



Bethlehem's North and West Side neighborhoods, were found to have "deteriorated" or "sub-standard" building conditions on approximately 50% of all properties.

The North Side Central Business District report identified the major improvements and investments that have taken place in the downtown shopping blocks, but also describes the deteriorated conditions that exist in neighborhoods immediately to the north. That report also identified the concentration of vacant industrial buildings in the Moravian College neighborhood.

### **The Five-Year Consolidated Plan (2004)**

The City prepared this plan for fiscal years 2005-2009 to implement federal programs which fund housing, community development, and economic development projects. Project funding comes from the City's Community Development Block Grant program entitlement and HOME Investment Partnerships program entitlement from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD uses the goals established in the plan to evaluate the success of the Five-Year Consolidated Plan, and to determine what and how much funding the City will receive in successive years. Included are analyses of the current housing market, housing and homeless needs assessments, a strategic plan, and an action plan.

The Strategic Plan section of this report identifies the following goals, all of which directly relate to the Elm Street Program:

- Increase home ownership
- Reduce housing blight and deterioration among owner households
- Improve rental housing opportunities
- Improve public facilities
- Improve and maintain infrastructure
- Support vital public services
- Continued support for urban revitalization and development

Pertinent selections from the plan's "Activities to be Undertaken" include the following:

- Continue with street overlays in low income areas along with engineering and design
- Provide cuts through curbs to facilitate access
- Replace street trees
- Eliminate blight through acquisition and demolition of blighted structures
- Conduct drug surveillance in the City's low to moderate income areas
- Fund additional community police officers
- Continue to support the Facade Program and other programs which support maintenance of commercial establishments and the development of jobs
- Provide funds for development of owner-occupied housing
- Continue funding the Housing Rehabilitation Program
- Provide funds for continuing City planning efforts

### **Zoning Ordinance (Adopted 1970, Last Amended 2005)**

Bethlehem's Zoning Ordinance regulates land use, lot size, and other characteristics of development, such as density, parking and signage. The City has continually updated the zoning ordinance to make sure that only appropriate types and mixes of development or re-development take place throughout the city.

The area studied in this Elm Street Plan contains varying types and densities of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional zoning districts, which will be described in a later section of this Plan.



Stately sycamores and well-kept homes line this street in Bethlehem's Elmwood Park neighborhood.

## **EXISTING ASSETS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Existing conditions in the Elm Street Plan Area are described in this section as a combination of assets and constraints. These positive and negative points were developed as a result of extensive data collection from public meetings, steering committee meetings, key person interviews, digital mapping, census data, and field reconnaissance surveys. Existing conditions are organized into the following categories:

- Housing and Historic Preservation
- Streetscape and Public Infrastructure
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Circulation and Parking
- Economic Development
- Public Safety
- Land Use and Zoning
- Organizational and Funding Resources

Existing assets and constraints are used to develop the goals, objectives, and recommendations which appear in later chapters of the Plan. They are also used to determine which sections of the Study Area should receive focused attention and funding through the Elm Street Program as a “Target District”. These assets and constraints are the local conditions most likely to influence the future development and success of the Study Area.

### **Housing and Historic Preservation**

#### *Assets*

#### **1. Wide Range of Housing Types**

The Study Area has a wide range of housing types. Single-family attached units, such as twin or row homes, make up approximate 38% of the housing stock, followed by single-family detached housing at 24%. The remaining homes are apartments. Within each of these housing types, there are diverse styles represented. These vary from the large homes found in the Mount Airy and Old Rosemont neighborhoods, to Craftsman bungalows, to multiple-unit row homes and apartment buildings. This diversity in housing types strengthens both the housing market and the community. It also helps maintain a balance between rental and owner-occupied housing in the Study Area neighborhoods.

#### **2. Above Average Housing Conditions**

As a whole, housing in the Study Area is in good condition, with no seriously dilapidated areas. Owners appear to take pride in their properties, performing the required general maintenance. In many cases, properties have been enhanced with special paint schemes or interesting landscaping. In some areas where conditions have started to lapse, restoration and repair projects are being

undertaken by the property owners. Many of these maintenance issues are focused on paint, roof, gutter or siding needs, a point also identified in the City's Land Use and Conditions Report (referenced on pages 4-5 of this Plan). It is important to address these issues as soon as possible before one property with poor maintenance turns into an entire block. The Housing Rehabilitation Program offered by the City Department of Community and Economic Development is a good resource for assisting owners with improvement projects.

### **3. Architectural and Historic Character of Neighborhoods**

The Study Area contains a number of architecturally significant and historic neighborhoods. Eighty percent of homes in the Study Area were constructed prior to 1960. In fact, 55% were built before 1940. In some instances, a concentration of architecturally and/or historically significant structures has resulted in local or national historic districts to recognize and preserve these treasures. The Central Bethlehem Historic District and the Mount Airy National Historic District are two examples. Many other neighborhoods in the Study Area contain structures of architectural character that contribute to their identity and sense of place within the city.



Historic homes along High Street in the Central Bethlehem Historic District.

### **4. Historic Preservation Efforts**

The Study Area contains three recognized historic districts. The Central Bethlehem Historic District is located in and surrounding Center City and contains many structures related to Moravian settlement. The Historic and Architectural Review Board (HARB) helps to guide the appropriate development and maintenance of structures here. In addition, the Historic Bethlehem Partnership (HBP) is actively restoring and maintaining numerous buildings in the area. The other two historic districts are federally recognized for their association with the development of the steel industry. There are no regulations or governing bodies associated with these two districts. The Mount Airy National Historic District comprises an area in west Bethlehem where steel executives built their homes. Many of these large buildings remain as single family residences today. The Elmwood Park National Historic District is an area where company housing was built for steel workers during World War I. Although many of the houses there have been modified, and some have been removed altogether, the layout and remaining houses in this district represent important links to the development of the area. Historic districts are shown on Map 3.

## **5. Forward-Looking Zoning Policies**

The City recognizes the implications of zoning on residential neighborhoods, especially regarding the encroachment of commercial development in areas that are predominantly residential. Although it is often not desirable for residential areas to completely preclude commercial development, the type and effects of infusing too much could restructure the neighborhood and possibly lead to decline. Activities such as the recent re-zoning of a predominantly residential area of the Near North Side from commercial to residential can have a significant positive impact on preserving the City's residential neighborhoods.

### ***Constraints***

#### **1. Conversion of Single-Family Homes into Apartments**

Healthy neighborhoods feature a balance of housing types. A balance of owner-occupied and rental properties helps generate a diverse population within a neighborhood. However, prolific conversions of single-family houses into apartments can lead to decline. A concentration of these conversions has developed in some locations, especially in the Near North Side. These are the same areas where deferred maintenance has led to a less-than-desirable neighborhood image. Additionally, conversion of a single family home into two or more apartments potentially doubles or triples the amount of parking spaces occupied by building residents. This is an important concern in an area already lacking adequate parking.

#### **2. Absentee landlords**

There is concern in certain areas about absentee landlords. In some cases, these properties are poorly maintained. This may be a result of infrequent visits by the owner to the property, allowing problems to go unfixed for long periods. In other cases, the landlord may receive notification from a tenant of a situation that has arisen but fails to take prompt action to rectify it. In either case, the structure itself suffers and begins to decline. Isolated cases of this may not be a problem but where these situations become more common, the whole area begins to suffer.

#### **3. General Maintenance Needs**

Although a majority of the Study Area contains housing in good condition, there are locations where deferred maintenance on both owner-occupied and rental properties is prevalent. Two concentrations include the Near North and Near West sides. Although these areas are not suffering from serious maintenance needs such as condemned or uninhabitable housing, they tend to require better maintenance and upkeep. This may include repairing facades with new siding, washing and pointing brick, painting, or other general maintenance needs. These lapses in maintenance may result from complacent, elderly, financially challenged, or disinterested owners. In situations where landlords are involved, they may be unaware a problem exists or not willing to make the required investment. In other cases, a general attitude of apathy may result in a property's decline. Deferred maintenance should be mitigated as soon as possible to maintain the positive visual character of the neighborhoods. In addition, properties with deferred maintenance often have reduced property values

and may also bring down values of adjacent properties. The Housing Rehabilitation Program offered by the City Department of Community and Economic Development is a good resource for assisting owners with exterior improvements.

#### **4. “Remuddling”**

The influx of new buildings or the inappropriate modification to existing structures (“remuddling”) can significantly change the character of a neighborhood. Not all new construction or remodeling projects involve incompatible alterations. But in cases where it does, the effect can very unappealing. Setback alterations on streets where they are otherwise uniform, post-war modern construction inserted among older buildings, and drastically different duplex and row home designs can negatively affect a neighborhood. These changes may result in conflicting design styles that are irreconcilable opposites. Although diversity is an important component to a healthy neighborhood, this should not come at the expense of architectural style or neighborhood character.



A modern-era building and parking lot set among older, traditional buildings on Linden Street.

#### **5. Variances Allowing Certain Commercial Uses in Residential Zones**

Although mixed use is a positive element for creating successful neighborhoods, it is important to avoid certain types of commercial development in predominantly residential areas. The scale of commercial development in essential locations should respect the neighborhood, preferably small businesses that provide services for the immediate neighborhood. Specialty shops that may attract patrons from outside the area can be desirable. An issue develops when variances are granted for commercial development that does not positively contribute to the needs or character of the neighborhood. Variances that allow large commercial enterprises in or near traditional residential zones are particularly inappropriate.



## **Streetscape and Public Infrastructure**

### *Assets*

#### **1. Identifiable Gateways**

The Study Area contains a number of identifiable gateways into the City of Bethlehem. The Third Avenue and Eighth Avenue interchanges of Route 378, the Minsi Trail Bridge on Stefko Boulevard, and other major entrances serve as “introductions” to Bethlehem’s North and West sides. Gateways are important for welcoming visitors and residents alike and displaying a positive image of the City. Typically, improving these gateways involves the control of adjacent land uses, installing landscaping and creative urban design. There is potential in the Study Area for gateway improvements along major surface routes and expressway exits.

#### **2. Infrastructure Mostly in Good Condition**

Bethlehem Public Works Department does a good job maintaining public infrastructure in the City. The sanitary and storm sewer systems are adequate and street surfaces are well maintained. Sidewalks, although maintained by the property owner, are also in good or fair condition in most places in the Study Area. The city is in the seventh year of a ten-year curb cut installation plan, with all but a few isolated instances having been addressed in the Study Area (see Map 6).

#### **3. Center City Improvements**

The City has completed extensive capital improvement projects in the Center City area, installing new crosswalks, street trees and street lights. While some upgrades are still needed, Center City Bethlehem is an example of the potential that other City sections may be able to reach with help of physical streetscape improvements.



Attractive buildings and streetscape elements in Center City Bethlehem.

#### **4. Five-Year Plan for Improving Public Infrastructure**

The Public Works Department has developed a five-year plan for improving streets and other public infrastructure elements. This plan identifies sanitary and storm sewer, street lighting, traffic and paving projects that need to be completed. A computer program is used to help evaluate and prioritize the paving needs for all City streets. The five-year plan aids in the allocation of funds for completing projects and can help to identify areas where streetscape improvements may be able to coincide with other public works projects.

## ***Constraints***

### **1. Sidewalks Present Many Challenges**

Although a majority of the sidewalks within the Study Area are in good to fair condition, there are many areas where they need repair. Map 4 provides a general overview of sidewalk conditions throughout the Study Area. Sidewalks are an important component of the streetscape and there are a number of issues concerning their maintenance and upkeep. In some locations, sidewalks are absent altogether, especially in Far West Side neighborhoods. Other sidewalk issues result from heaving due to tree roots, cracked and/or scaling surfaces, and general deterioration of sidewalk conditions, all of which create poor accessibility for pedestrians. The City policy of placing the burden of sidewalk maintenance on the property owner (which is similar in nearly every Pennsylvania municipality), poses a challenge in maintaining consistent, high-quality sidewalks.



An example of sidewalk heaving and cracking due to tree roots, a widespread phenomenon in the North and West Sides.

### **2. Shortage of Trees on Many Streets**

Many areas have a shortage of street trees, an important component of a pleasing streetscape (Map 5). In some cases, this is a result of having insufficient room to properly install and ensure their survival. Street trees may have been removed and not replanted in some locations. Resident complaints of tree litter, sidewalk upheaval and other maintenance concerns also play a role in the installation and maintenance of street trees. It is important to properly select the species installed for a street tree because of these concerns.

### **3. Abundance of Overhead Utility Wires**

The character of a streetscape is hurt by the presence of overhead utility wires. An abundance of these phone, electricity and cable service wires can detract from an area's appearance. The relocation of these services, either underground or to alleys, can be a logistical and financial stumbling block due to the numerous providers and high cost of burying the utilities.



Overhead wires on Garrison Street.



#### **4. Street Lighting Limited**

Street lighting plays an important role in the visual character of the streetscape and the safety of the street at night. Poorly lit streets are not conducive to pedestrian traffic. Although there are street lights provided throughout the Study Area, the type and location of these elements may not always provide the best service. The location of the lights high on poles at intersections of neighborhood streets is important for illuminating these locations. But these lights do little to illuminate the rest of the street for pedestrian traffic. The installation of more regularly spaced period lighting on shorter poles, though costly, can illuminate both the street and the sidewalk for a safer environment for vehicles and pedestrians alike.

### **Parks, Recreation and Open Space**

#### *Assets*

##### **1. Variety of Parks**

The Study Area contains a variety of parks and open space facilities. These are shown on Map 7, and outlined in Table 1 on the following page. Listed in the table is information on each park's owner, acreage, facilities present, and short comments on their condition. The diversity in parks and open space options presents residents both passive and active recreation opportunities. Some of the larger parks contain many different activities such as tennis, basketball, baseball, swimming, and playgrounds. Smaller parks may only have modest playground areas. Many of these parks are small neighborhood parks close to highly populated residential areas. Some of these parks serve more than one function, such as Sand Island Park, which is also an access point for the Lehigh Canal Towpath.

##### **2. Recent Capital Improvements**

Many of the parks in the study area have received large new play structures within the last five years. These facilities are beneficial for a number of reasons. They help bring the play areas of the park up to current ADA and playground safety regulations. This will help prevent injuries from older, less safe equipment. Also, the materials found on these structures are more vandal-resistant than older materials.



New playground equipment at Elmwood Park.

**Table 1**  
**PARK INVENTORY**

NAME	OWNER	SIZE	FACILITIES	CONDITION, COMMENTS
Elmwood Park	City	0.92 ac	Playground, full size basketball court, picnic tables, benches, old swing set, pavement, kick board, storage building	Playground structure is new. Undefined paving, no trees, grass, poor swings and other play equipment.
Fairview Park	City	0.88 ac	2 full size basketball courts surrounded by paving, playground equipment, remnants of walking loop	Playground structure is new. No ADA access, low quantity of shade trees, grass, excessive pavement. Basketball hoops need updating.
Friendship Park	City	1.63 ac	playground, swings, full size basketball courts,, benches, lots of paving.	Playground structure is new. Too much empty paving, no trees, little grass, ADA access problems. Poor swings and no hoops for basketball on one court
Higbee Park	City	0.82 ac	1 full size basketball court, lots of paving, swing sets, benches, good backboards, large upper paved area.	No shade trees, grass areas poorly defined. Swing sets not to code, fence in poor condition. ADA access a concern, areas of programmable space in poor condition
Johnston Park	City	11.32 ac	Colonial industrial quarter, walking paths, programmable festival space	Undefined central path (Monocacy Way), heavy festival use hampers growth of grass.
Lehigh Canal Towpath	City	50.99 ac	Gravel path	Heavy rain or snow causes ponding, muddy spots.
Rose Garden	City	8.00 ac	Band shell and benches on open asphalt area, restrooms, memorial house, various monuments, rose garden, play equipment, open field, benches	New play structure and restrooms. Pathways poorly defined or non-existent. Maintenance shed in poor condition, lighting deficient
Sand Island Park	City	13.80 ac	Ice House, Sand Island, small strolling garden, gravel paths, 2 play structures, 2 full size basketball courts, restroom building, 8 tennis courts, parking	Best maintained park, all facilities in good condition, good lighting.
Stratford Park	City	4.39 ac	Open space, adjacent resident parking.	Undeveloped tract with woods and thick undergrowth.
Triangle Park	City	0.37 ac	Play equipment, ½ court basketball, grass area	Poorly defined parking, minimal shade trees, play equipment is in poor condition.
West Side Park	City	8.16 ac	Junior ballfield, concession, press box, bleacher, dugouts, 2 full size basketball courts, shuffle board, pool, playground and play equipment, 2 tennis courts, paved paths, handball court	Outfield fence and playground is new, poor ADA access to field, general maintenance needed, no hoops on courts, drainage problems, neglected pavement, picnic tables & benches are lacking, play equipment is in poor condition.
West Walnut Street Park	City	0.12 ac	Benches, landscaping	Excellent “pocket park.”
Rosemont Recreation Club	Private club	0.43 ac	Tennis court, small basketball court, picnic tables, various play equipment	Members only, fairly good equipment.
City Hall Plaza	City	5.74 ac	Plaza, Japanese garden	Excessive blank space, connection to Fahy Bridge needed.

### **3. Active Community Park Groups**

Some of the parks in the Study Area have active community groups or Adopt-A-Park organizations that help to monitor and maintain the properties. These groups help reduce the workload of the police and parks departments. Clean-up, supervision, and neighborhood park festivals are some of the activities performed by these groups. These programs help residents take pride in their park and create a sense of ownership. Residents also become more familiar with the activities taking place in the parks through neighborhood programs and monitoring efforts. These efforts also help reduce illicit use of the parks. In some cases, the parks serve as a location for periodic neighborhood festivals.

### **4. Multiple-Use Trails**

The Monocacy Way and Lehigh Canal Towpath are multiple-use trails that provide walking, hiking and biking opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Both trails are also used by people fishing in the adjacent water bodies. The location of these trails presents the opportunity to establish connections between parks within and adjacent to the Study Area. The Lehigh Canal Towpath is part of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Trail, an extensive trail network that, when complete, will extend from Bristol to Wilkes-Barre. In a local context, the Towpath links Bethlehem to the cities of Allentown and Easton. The Monocacy Way links Sand Island Park with the Monocacy Park Complex on Illick's Mill Road, although additional work may need to be completed to strengthen this connection.

### **5. Undeveloped/Vacant Land for Future Parks and Trails**

The Study Area contains undeveloped and vacant land that could eventually be converted into parks, public open space or trails. Where parcels are located in a more dense urban environment, small neighborhood parks could provide places for residents to recreate close to home. Additional trails could help to link together neighborhoods and parks that would otherwise be disconnected. Additional parks and open space within the City would also provide more green relief. Stratford Park, located on the west side and without any public park facilities nearby, is an undeveloped parcel owned by the city that could be developed for passive recreation with picnic facilities, outdoor education stations or walking trails.

### **6. Public and Private Institutions Open to Public**

The Study Area contains public and private institutions that provide recreation opportunities for City residents. These include the playgrounds of elementary schools, college lawns and cemetery pathways. These sites help reduce the burden on the city to provide additional recreation facilities. With careful planning, duplication of services is reduced and funding can be directed toward other projects. College property presents an opportunity for the residents to become acquainted with the learning institution in their backyard. Cemeteries provide a quiet location for contemplation and strolling.

## ***Constraints***

### **1. Funding for Capital Improvements and Maintenance**

Although certain parks within the Study Area have received major capital improvements within the past five years, other facilities require similar treatment. As is typical with operating a large city, budget constraints and allocations influence the development of these parks. For these parks to be maintained at levels consistent with their use, additional funding may need to be appropriated.

### **2. Need for Recreation Programs, Especially for Teens**

Recreation programs and other positive outlets for teens may help direct these impressionable individuals away from illegal or unhealthy activities. Neighborhood residents have expressed concern about after hours use of the parks, resulting in the removal of certain activities. In cases such as this, the entire neighborhood suffers. More evening and summer programs may help keep these activities in the parks where they can be enjoyed by all. These programs could also provide a positive environment for young people.

### **3. Abuse of Facilities**

Park maintenance in the Study Area is a substantial task even without the added burden of vandalism and other abusive activities. Many of these parks have extensive areas of bituminous paving because landscaping has been vandalized. Some parks are also used for drug dealing and abuse. Active police and park association monitoring can help to deter the abuse of these facilities but other methods for instilling community pride in the parks may be necessary.

### **4. Festivals Present Challenges**

Some parks within the Study Area are not fully developed because of the various festivals that take place throughout the year. While these festivals are important economic and social events for the City, they only use the facilities at these parks for a small percentage of time. To improve festival environs, increase the recreation opportunities available, and provide better connections to community and other recreation facilities, further development could be implemented at these parks.

### **5. Park Maintenance and Development Issues**

Vandalism and funding constraints can hamper park maintenance and improvement. Issues resulting from these constraints include the excessive use of bituminous paving, shortage of shade trees and lawn areas, and the removal of some activities from parks altogether. In some parks, there are significant construction projects needed to address long-term maintenance needs. By increasing the funding for these projects and developing additional public involvement programs, the overall conditions of the parks could be improved.



- ◀ Friendship Park is covered primarily with bituminous paving and has very few trees to shield the hot summer sun.

## **Circulation and Parking**

### *Assets*

#### **1. Excellent Access from Major Highways**

The Elm Street Study Area is served directly by State Route 378, a four-lane limited access highway. Two miles outside the Study Area are U.S. Route 22 and Interstate 78, major limited access highways which provide access to Philadelphia, Northern New Jersey, New York City, Harrisburg, and Northeastern Pennsylvania, all in under two hours of driving. These highways serve as arteries of “lifeblood” for Bethlehem, funneling investment in the form of tourism, commerce, new business, and new residents. Bethlehem, which already enjoys a central location in the Lehigh Valley and on the Eastern Seaboard, wins additional convenience because of these highways.

#### **2. Traffic Congestion Rare**

Except for peak-hour traffic on Route 378, and the occasional heavy stacking at downtown traffic signals in the evening, the Study Area is virtually devoid of major traffic tie-ups. Traffic congestion, which increases commute times, engine emissions, as well as human frustration and stress, is a problem in many other areas of the Lehigh Valley. Traffic congestion is a major consideration when people and businesses decide to relocate. In this regard, the Study Area has an edge over many other areas. Traveling between different destinations within the Elm Street Study Area, even if by car, rarely involves being stuck in traffic.

#### **3. Wide Cartways Offer Potential for Improvements**

The Study Area contains a number of wide streets, some of which contained electric trolley routes in the early 20th Century. Others were built in an era when wide residential streets were equated with wealth and grandeur. These wide streets are well-suited for improvements that would potentially calm traffic, improve safe travel for pedestrians and bicycles, and offer space for visual improvements such as street trees and landscaping.

#### **4. Parking Reserved for Residential and Commercial Uses**

The Bethlehem Parking Authority puts forth a concerted effort to serve the parking needs of residents, commuters, and shoppers. For visitors to the North Side Central Business District, several City-owned parking garages and surface lots provide designated areas for off-street parking. These public parking areas include the following:

- Walnut Street Garage - West Walnut Street between Guetter and New Streets - 777 spaces.
- North Street Garage - West North Street between Main and Guetter Streets - 800 spaces.
- Broad Street Lot - East Broad Street between Long and School Streets - 117 spaces.
- Guetter Street Lot - Guetter Street between Raspberry and North Streets - 48 spaces. (This parking lot may eventually be replaced by an 18-story mixed-use building.)

For shorter visits, metered parking and time-limit zones on the streets are available. Current parking meter rates are 50 cents per hour, and time limits range from 30 minutes to 4 hours. Parking meters are found along the following street segments in the Study Area:

- East Elizabeth Avenue between New and Center Streets
- Broad Street between 7th Avenue and Center Street
- West Walnut Street between Main and New Streets
- Market Street between Main and Center Streets
- Main Street between Broad Street and Union Boulevard
- Guetter Street between Walnut and North Streets
- North New Street between Church Street and North Street
- Long Street between Market and North Streets

Many residential neighborhoods within the Study Area have permit zones which prohibit non-residents from parking longer than two hours. Residents place permit stickers on their windshields and pay an annual fee of \$10 (\$20 for the first year), as of 2005. The City also offers permit parking for business owners and employees, which starts at \$50 for one year. Permit zones extend as far west as 11th Avenue on the West Side, as far east as Maple Street on the East Side, and northward to Elizabeth Avenue.

#### **5. Curb Cut Improvement Program**

The City of Bethlehem is pursuing a 10-year curb cut improvement program, currently in its seventh year. Nearly all intersections with sidewalks in the Study Area now feature ramps from sidewalk level to street level. Curb cuts facilitate safe street crossings for pedestrians throughout the Study Area, and are especially beneficial to those with physical or visual impairment.

## **6. Multiple-Use Trails**

Two City-maintained trails offer an alternative means of traveling between City and regional destinations, in addition to their recreational benefits. In recent decades, trails have become highly sought-after amenities which boost a community's desirability and livability. The two Study Area trails are:

- Lehigh Canal Towpath - A crushed gravel path following the historic Lehigh Canal from Allentown eastward to Easton. Access to the towpath in the Study Area can be found at Sand Island Park in Center City and at the Minsi Trail Bridge stairway, where Stefko Boulevard crosses the Lehigh River.
- Monocacy Way - A gravel trail traveling north-south along Monocacy Creek, and linking the Colonial Industrial Quarter at Johnston Park to the Burnside Plantation on Eaton Avenue. Unmarked trails and sidewalks extend the Monocacy Path northward to Illick's Mill Road, and southward to the Lehigh Canal Towpath.

## **7. Public Transportation Provided by LANTA**

The Study Area is well-served by public transportation. No residence in the Study Area is more than 6/10 of a mile from a bus stop, and many residences are much closer. The Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) operates eight daytime bus routes through the Study Area, as well as two night routes (see Map 10 - Public Transportation, following this page.) Two of the most successful bus routes are the 'A' and 'E' routes which run on Broad Street and Hanover Avenue between Bethlehem and Allentown. Buses on these routes often fill to capacity during peak hours. Ticket prices in 2005 are \$1.75 for a single ride, \$2.00 for an all-day pass, and \$35.00 for a monthly pass, all of which are modest compared to transit prices in larger cities.



LANTA now provides bicycle racks on most of its buses. Photo: LANTA.

At the intersection of Guetter and Raspberry Streets in Center City Bethlehem is LANTA's Bethlehem Bus Terminal, a major transfer and stopping point for bus routes. The non-profit Coalition for Appropriate Transportation has "adopted" this station, keeping it clean and safe for LANTA riders.

LANTA has also installed two bicycle racks in the front of each of its Metro buses (these are the buses which serve the fixed routes through Bethlehem). This program has been successful, attracting riders who may live further than walking distance from bus stops.



## **8. Coalition for Appropriate Transportation**

The Bethlehem-based Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (CAT) is an educational non-profit entity whose main goal is to increase and facilitate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modes of travel. CAT does the following to promote alternative transportation:

- Teaches courses on bicycle maintenance and safe urban bicycle riding
- Maintains portions of the Lehigh Canal Towpath and Monocacy Path
- Cleans the Bethlehem Bus Terminal on Guetter Street in its “Adopt-a-Station” program
- Offers bicycle parking and showers for bicycle commuters in Center City Bethlehem for a minimal monthly fee
- Lobbies community leaders for pedestrian, bicycle, and transit improvements throughout the Lehigh Valley.

### ***Constraints***

#### **1. Wide Streets Encourage Speeding**

The same wide streets which once carried horse-drawn carriages and electric trolleys are now a haven for vehicular speeding. Speeding, in turn, creates unsafe situations for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other drivers. With nothing to physically or visually constrain vehicle travel, drivers proceed at a speed much higher than what is safe and appropriate for the urban setting. Interviews, meetings, and field reconnaissance revealed the following wide streets as popular for speeding, among others:

- West Broad Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Main Street
- East Broad Street between Center Street and Stefko Boulevard
- West Union Boulevard between Pennsylvania Avenue and 8th Avenue
- Main Street between Broad and Laurel Streets
- Center Street between Church Street and Elizabeth Avenue
- Linden Street between Elizabeth Avenue and Church Street

Posted speed limits on these streets are either 30 or 35 miles per hour, which in some concentrated urban areas may be slightly high.



A car speeds south on Linden Street.



## **2. One-Way Street Issues**

Just like wide streets, one-way streets can encourage drivers to speed. This is especially true on two-lane one-way streets, where vehicle movements in the adjacent lane are predictable, and the overall cartway is wide. A recent study of Center and Linden Streets concluded that with all other conditions being the same, drivers in two unidirectional lanes travel 5 miles per hour faster than two-way traffic (Benchmark Civil Engineering Services, 2003). This same study also concluded that the cost to convert both streets back to two-way would be approximately \$500,000.

Pedestrians, cyclists, and other drivers are at risk on high-speed one-way streets just as they are on wide, two-lane streets. One-way streets with speeding concerns have been identified as the following. All of these were programmed for one-way traffic in the mid-20th century to efficiently move commuter traffic associated with Bethlehem Steel Corporation through Center City and the North Side:

- Center Street between Church Street and Elizabeth Avenue
- Linden Street between Fairview and Church Streets
- Church Street between Linden and Center Streets

Another identified constraint associated with one-way streets is wrong-way driving. Regardless of the number of “One Way” or “Do Not Enter” signs posted on one way streets, some drivers mistakenly travel against the traffic flow. This is an obvious safety hazard even when it occurs for only a short distance.

## **3. Traffic Signal Challenges**

Challenges have arisen from the way traffic signals are located and programmed in the Study Area. Three major issues have been identified:

- Consecutive traffic lights on New, Center, and Linden Streets are programmed to allow continuous travel through green lights. Many drivers in this scenario are lulled into a highway-like trance as they pass through dense urban areas. Drivers situated towards the end of the green-light cycle sometimes speed in order to “make” all of the lights.
- At some intersections with considerable pedestrian activity, legal right-turns-on-red create difficult crossings for pedestrians, and also discourage drivers from making a complete stop.
- In some cases, the *absence* of a traffic signal causes high vehicle travel speeds. This was noted in the vicinity of East Broad Street and Wood Street, where pedestrians commonly cross to visit the Post Office or YMCA, and older residents at Moravian Village may be out for a walk. Speeding also occurs on West Broad Street, Center Street, and Linden Street, which all have numerous unsignalized intersections in conjunction with high pedestrian activity and wide cartways.

#### **4. Heavy Truck Traffic**

Trucks pose safety, noise, and air quality concerns for certain Study Area neighborhoods. West Bethlehem is fortunate to have two clusters of industrial employment which provide work for people with a wide range of income levels: one at the northern end of 14th Avenue, and another along Lehigh Street between 7th and 13th Avenues. But some residents in these vicinities are unhappy with the noise, exhaust, and safety concerns associated with the truck traffic. In some cases, trucks deviate from the designated truck route (Lehigh Street and 13th Avenue), or park for long periods of time on residential streets, causing further discontent. Heavy truck traffic also exists throughout the Study Area in the form of numerous private garbage haulers, each with a different schedule and a wide geographic distribution of customers.

#### **5. Parking Conflicts**

Parking conflicts among residents, workers, and tourists are common in the Study Area, especially in neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the Central Business District. In these particular areas, where on-street parking is the norm, a high density of homes coexists with overflow parking from Center City. This situation has worsened as single-family homes have been converted into two or more apartments, doubling or tripling the number of parked cars in these areas. Many people who work downtown do not wish to pay the \$30 to \$60 monthly fee for Center City parking garages and lots, and therefore add more parking demand in adjacent neighborhoods. The Moravian College neighborhood sees similar problems, with many students not wishing to pay for on-campus parking permits. When Bethlehem hosts popular festivals such as Musikfest and Celtic Classic, the already constrained parking situation in the close-in neighborhoods worsens, and many residents are forced to park far from their homes, or illegally place chairs in the street to save their spots.

#### **6. On-Street Parking Conditions Hamper Snow Removal**

The current City parking system during the winter months makes snow removal difficult and compounds parking problems in areas where parking is already at a premium. Alternate side parking or employing a snow clearing policy similar to summer street cleaning would help to alleviate this problem.

#### **7. Physical Challenges to Pedestrian Safety**

The Study Area is fortunate to include a mix of land uses which promotes walking. However, the goal of a pedestrian-friendly community is difficult to reach under certain existing conditions, some of which have already been mentioned as traffic concerns:

- *Wide streets, one-way streets, and certain traffic signal arrangements induce vehicular speeding.* These scenarios create a difficult and sometimes unsafe situation for pedestrians.
- *Discontinuous or deteriorated sidewalks encourage street walking.* The Near North Side contains many sidewalks which have deteriorated over time, either from weathering or from tree root upheaval. The West Side, especially west of 13th Avenue, contains an incomplete network of disjointed sidewalks, beginning and ending as many as five times in a singular block. Poor or absent sidewalks encourage people (as well as their small children and pets) to walk in the street and join vehicular traffic.
- *Crosswalks and push-button signals are rare outside of the Central Business District.* The painted white lines and brick pavers which guide pedestrians at street crossings in Center City are not common in other portions of the Study Area. Likewise, push-button crosswalks and walk-only phases at traffic signals are only found at selected intersections. While these facilities are not a necessity at every street intersection, their absence is felt along major thoroughfares such as West Broad Street, East Broad Street, West Union Boulevard, Center Street, and Linden Street.
- *Schools are prone to vehicle/pedestrian conflicts.* The Study Area's public and private schools are major hubs of simultaneous pedestrian and vehicular activity, often posing risks to both. Nitschman Middle School and Liberty High School are particularly prone to vehicle/pedestrian conflicts, being located at the intersections of major thoroughfares.



Many streets west of 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue have a disjointed network of sidewalks.

## **8. Some Streets Not Bicycle-Friendly**

Certain streets in the Study Area are particularly unsuitable for bicycle travel, due to various combinations of narrow travel lanes, multiple travel lanes (3 or more), heavy traffic volume, or frequent truck traffic. Unfortunately for bicyclists, these same streets are important connections between major destinations. Streets that meet this criteria include:

- North New Street between Broad Street and Elizabeth Avenue
- Elizabeth Avenue between Main Street and Linden Street
- West Lehigh Street between 13th Avenue and Conestoga Street
- 8th Avenue between Broad Street and Eaton Avenue



8<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the Route 378 interchange.

## **9. Bicycle Rack Shortage**

The City has installed a bicycle rack at City Hall, and another at the corner of Main and Broad Streets. But with those as exceptions, bicyclists have few places to lock their bikes when stopping at destinations such as the Colonial Industrial Quarter, Sand Island, neighborhood parks, and many other hubs of activity. Bicycle use may be deterred by this fact. Some who still choose to ride their bicycles lock them to trees and signposts. Destination facilities are an important component of a bicycle-friendly city. If there is no place to safely and reliably secure bicycles, they will not be used as a mode of transportation.

## **10. Multiple-Use Path Potential Not Yet Fully Realized**

Portions of the Lehigh Canal Towpath and Monocacy Way in Bethlehem are not well marked. The Towpath is not identified as a public trail anywhere on the ground. In addition, the correct route through Sand Island Park is not identified, leaving some through-travelers on the Towpath confused.

Monocacy Way is intended to connect the Lehigh Canal Towpath with Illick's Mill (an historic site one mile north of the Study Area). However, only the section between Union Boulevard and Burnside Plantation is clearly marked as a trail, but only at the southern end of this section. North of Eaton Avenue, an unmarked singletrack trail leads into the woods and eventually terminates in the large meadow area of Monocacy Park. The path fails to make any direct, identified connection to Illick's Mill Road. South of Union Boulevard, the Monocacy Path follows Old York Road, and then merges with various walkways in the Colonial Industrial Quarter, never formally connecting to the nearby Lehigh Canal Towpath.

The Lehigh Canal Towpath has few access points. In the Study Area, people can access the trail only at Sand Island, or by descending nearly 100 concrete steps on the Minsi Trail Bridge. Only the Sand Island access point has parking. Westward from Sand Island, the next access point is at Canal Park in Allentown, four miles away.

## **11. Transit Often Underused**

Locally, public transit usage is low. According to the 2000 Census, only 2.3% of Study Area residents use public transportation to commute to work. While the Study Area contains eight bus routes and a major bus terminal, most residents and workers are not sold on using transit. Common reasons stated by Study Area residents for not riding buses include the following:

- *Low frequency of service* - LANTA buses generally run on 30-minute or 60-minute schedules during weekdays. Frequencies are lower (further apart) before 7:00 A.M., after 6:00 P.M. and on weekends. Studies have shown that only 10 to 15 minute frequencies will increase transit usage. However, such an upgrade in service would cost millions of dollars, and would be difficult to justify without more demand.

- *Too many transfers* - Many people will not ride buses if they must transfer to another bus. Bus routes from Center City Bethlehem provide access to Center City Allentown and Downtown Easton on a single trip, but trips to other destinations often involve multiple buses.
- *Safety worries* - This is largely a perceived problem. However, some residents are scared to ride the bus because of fears about crime. To help address these fears, LANTA has installed security cameras on nearly all buses.

## **Economic Development**

### *Assets*

#### **1. Strong Central Business District**

Bethlehem's North Side Central Business District (CBD), also referred to as "Center City Bethlehem", includes specialty shops, restaurants, museums, historic attractions, as well as music, holiday, and ethnic festivals. Local workers and tourists alike come to shop and experience Bethlehem's charm in Center City, especially during the Christmas season. Locally-owned specialty shops and restaurants offer a unique blend of commercial options for lunch-hour shoppers, college students and parents, residents, and tourists. The blend of commerce and tourism is vital to maintaining a vibrant CBD because it helps to distribute clientele throughout the day and evening hours, a key component to sustaining a healthy economic environment.

#### **2. Smaller Business Districts Complement the CBD**

The smaller business districts located along West Broad and Linden streets complement the CBD by providing for the everyday needs of residents in the surrounding neighborhoods without duplicating the services available in the CBD. Locally-owned establishments, such as corner grocery stores, laundry services, hair salons, and professional offices also provide a social atmosphere that encourages neighborly interaction.



West Broad Street features a mix of local businesses and a variety of housing types.



### **3. Locally-Owned Businesses**

Locally-owned businesses inherently offer pride and commitment not found in larger commercial operations. Local owners understand product or service value and the importance of maintaining a vibrant local economy, and the economic health of the North and West Side neighborhoods depends on the goods and services provided here.

### **4. Available Sites and Positive Climate for Redevelopment**

Vacant or underutilized buildings in the Study Area represent opportunities to bring commercial, residential, or mixed uses back onto the tax rolls. Many of the buildings are old, potentially historic, structures, and the city's economy includes a strong tourism component. Redeveloped, historic buildings will also strengthen the commercial and residential components of the local neighborhood. Bethlehem already enjoys a healthy redevelopment climate, with buildings such as the Silk Mill, Lehigh Riverport (on Bethlehem's South Side), and the former Bethlehem Steel lands currently proposed for redevelopment.



Old postcard showing the Bethlehem Silk Mill. Photo: City of Bethlehem.

### **5. Festivals**

Bethlehem hosts many festivals throughout the year that draw large attendance from throughout Pennsylvania and surrounding states. The commercial districts located throughout the Study Area provide the needed goods and services for visitors, injecting revenue into the local economy. Furthermore, visitors to a specific festival or event may find interest in another aspect of the city, leading to additional revenue and, perhaps, future residents.

### ***Constraints***

#### **1. Smaller Business Districts Need Streetscape Enhancements**

The streetscape and other physical enhancements installed in the CBD have greatly improved the appearance of this area and helped to stimulate the development of additional businesses by providing an enjoyable shopping environment. Improved street lighting, street trees, and sidewalks would not only improve the West Broad Street and Linden Street business districts but would also be a tangible indicator of the city's commitment to strengthen and diversify the local economy.

## **2. Pay Parking May Deter Some Potential Business**

Convenient, free parking has traditionally been a critical consideration in luring shoppers away from suburban malls and back to downtowns. Most of the streets in Bethlehem business districts have parking meters, and parking garages are located on the fringe of the shopping area. Both characteristics may put the business districts at a competitive disadvantage.

## **3. Competition with Large Chain Stores**

Most local businesses face strong competition from large chain stores in the suburban areas of the Lehigh Valley which have many more human and financial resources. Neighborhood presence and knowledge are often the only competitive advantages for local businesses. In addition, four upscale “lifestyle centers” are currently proposed within a 6-mile radius of Center City Bethlehem. These malls, which will also feature financially-advantaged chain stores, may potentially draw additional business away from the older commercial districts in Bethlehem.

## **4. Some Basic Goods and Services in Short Supply**

Basic goods and services, such as grocery stores, laundry services, or coffee shops, are in short supply in the Study Area, according to area residents. Neighborhood services would be much more convenient than suburban services and would undoubtedly earn local support. Mixed uses, which are not always well-received, might be an appropriate strategy for encouraging local services.

## **5. Challenge of Redeveloping Vacant/Older Buildings**

Many developers are turned away by the financial, legal and logistical challenges associated with redeveloping vacant or older buildings. In many cases, bank financing for redevelopment projects is also difficult to attain, especially when compared to loans for the more-predictable costs of new construction. Brownfields pose even greater challenges for redevelopment. These are sites where perceived or actual environmental contamination needs to be ameliorated in order for the site to be redeveloped. Some of the vacant or underutilized properties in the Study Area may be brownfields, which will pose physical, legal, and financial challenges that can be overwhelming and may deter potential investors.

## **6. Lack of Comprehensive Commercial Development Strategy**

The City has no comprehensive, unified strategy to encourage commercial development. Economic development is challenging because markets and strategies change rapidly. The neighborhood business districts on West Broad and Linden streets developed as a result of market forces. The need for services gave rise to the neighborhood commercial centers, which, in turn, strengthened the neighborhood. A comprehensive business strategy would strengthen the Study Area and the City by identifying needed goods and services and areas which can support local businesses.

## **Public Safety**

### *Assets*

#### **1. Community Police Officers**

The Bethlehem Police Department employs community police officers to proactively patrol and ensure safety in Bethlehem's neighborhoods. One full time community officer is stationed at each of the following community sub-stations in the Study Area:

- Main and Broad Streets
- Center and Garrison Streets
- West Broad Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- Parkridge Housing Development on the Far West Side

In addition, one officer is stationed at each of the junior/senior high schools in the Study Area: Liberty High School, Nitschman Middle School, and Northeast Middle School. Community officers' foremost task is responding to any and all resident calls. These include not just reports of crime, but also "quality of life" issues such as noise and loitering. Each community officer must review and address crime incident reports for their neighborhood jurisdiction, and hold monthly meetings with block watch captains and other community leaders. The officers are also involved in public safety programs for the youth of the neighborhood. Community officers have a well-established presence in the neighborhoods, and many residents know the officers by name.

#### **2. Block Watch Groups**

Block watches are groups of private citizens who take note of suspicious activity and nuisance issues, and report directly to community police officers. Block watches are able to perform block-level surveillance that City police do not have the resources to do on their own. Nine block watch groups exist in the Study Area, listed below:

- |                                      |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • Center Street (Neighbors on Watch) | • Moravian College |
| • Elmwood Street                     | • Sixth Avenue     |
| • Fairview Street                    | • Spring Street    |
| • Friendship Park                    | • West End Park    |
| • Liberty High School                |                    |

The individuals that comprise the block watch groups are dedicated to making sure their neighborhoods remain clean and safe.



### **3. Rare Personal Crime**

In the North and West Sides, “personal crimes” are very rare. Personal crimes include assault, murder, rape, and personal robbery. Gang activity is also not a major problem in the Study Area. Crime is limited primarily to property crime and drugs, described in the Constraints section below.

#### ***Constraints***

#### **1. Property Crime**

In the North and West Sides, crime against property is a minor problem. Property crime includes car break-ins and theft, house robbery, vandalism, and graffiti. While property in any part of the Study Area is prone to these crimes, the Near North Side sees a slightly higher occurrence of property crime incidents. Vandalism is also a concern, especially at neighborhood parks such as Friendship and Elmwood. Other reported crime areas include Linden Street between Elizabeth Avenue and Broad Street, North Street between High and Linden Streets, Spring Street between 6th and 7th Avenues, Broad Street between Main and New Streets, and the northeast corner of Broad and Center Streets. Areas with poor or absent street lighting tend to attract more crime than well-lit areas.

#### **2. Drugs in Public Spaces**

The selling and use of illegal drugs is a problem in portions of the Study Area. Neighborhood parks in the Near North and Near West Side (Elmwood, Fairview, Friendship and Higbee) see moderate drug use, primarily after dark. The Bethlehem Police Department occasionally assigns surveillance cars to these parks in the hours after sunset. Police officials hope to eventually use portable surveillance equipment to monitor parks and other spaces after dark, eliminating the need to commit additional man-hours.

#### **3. Shortage of Teen Activities**

Many police officers and residents mentioned a shortage of after-school, evening, and summer programs for children and teens. Activities such as sports and music provide a wholesome alternative to crime and drugs. The Bethlehem Police Department once sponsored outdoor movie nights at the parks, which soon became cost prohibitive. According to the Police officials, the lack of activities for adolescents and teens is one of the biggest challenges facing the North and West Sides.

#### **4. Public Safety Risk During Festivals**

Bethlehem’s popular festivals pose certain risks to public safety. Musikfest and Celtic Classic, held in August and September respectively, together draw more than one million visitors each year. The festivals fill Main Street, Sand Island, and the Colonial Industrial Quarter with throngs of people, vending tents, and performers. The safety concerns are twofold. Firstly, crime and drug use often occur unnoticed and shielded from the view of police patrols. Secondly, emergency vehicles have difficulty navigating through the crowds to reach medical and other emergencies.

## Land Use and Zoning

### *Assets*

#### 1. Mixed Uses

The Elm Street Study Area contains a variety of land uses in close proximity, a trait that most successful city neighborhoods share. This “traditional” land use pattern allows residents to travel between their residences, grocery stores, restaurants, parks, schools, places of employment, churches, and other destinations, all without driving. The convenience of mixed uses, and resulting “pedestrian-friendliness”, are key selling points when promoting and marketing the quality of town living. The Study Area is no exception, with 14 neighborhood parks, 12 schools, 4 shopping districts, as well as numerous restaurants, churches, and workplaces, all within 3 square miles which contain 9,600 housing units. Certain portions of the Study Area have a particularly diverse blend of land uses within a small area: West Broad Street, the Central Business District, and Linden Street. Map 9, which follows this page, shows the diversity of land uses found in the Study Area.



East Broad Street features many buildings with businesses on the lower floor and residences on upper floors.

#### 2. Appropriate Zoning

As described briefly in the Introduction, the City’s Zoning Ordinance helps to ensure that appropriate types of development, land use, and density are located in appropriate areas. Zoning districts in these neighborhoods largely reflect the land uses that existed prior to the advent of zoning. And while zoning separates different uses, the ordinance also contains provisions for mixing uses within a district, a major Elm Street Plan goal. Zoning districts found within the Study Area, which are shown on Map 10, include the following:

**R-S Residential District:** Allows for single-family residential areas of medium-density (6,000 s.f. minimum lot size).

**R-G Residential District:** Provides a transition from single-family residential uses into medium-density two-family and multi-family residences (4,000 s.f. minimum lot size).

**R-T Residential District:** Allows a variety of high-density housing types (3,000 s.f. minimum lot size).

**R-M Residential District:** Provides high-density residential uses and compatible residential-oriented non-residential uses (2,000 s.f. minimum lot size).

**R-RC Residential Retirement Complex:** Allows planned residential developments for retirement-age residents, including any associated dining, health care, or recreation facilities.

**C-B Commercial Business District:** Provides for various retail, office, and other commercial uses along with limited intensive residential development. Serves as the central business district.

**C-G General Commercial District:** Allows various commercial uses in addition to any residential use, including apartments above commercial uses.

**C-L Limited Commercial District:** Allows commercial uses which provide day-to-day needs of the immediate surrounding neighborhood (such as neighborhood grocers, restaurants, drug stores, doctors' offices, etc.)

**C-S Shopping Center District:** Encourages modern, well-planned community shopping centers with a variety of retail and service establishments.

**L-I Light Industrial District:** Permits modern light industrial uses in harmony with the surrounding land uses, such as research labs, printing, and light manufacture.

**P-I Planned Industrial District:** Provides modern industrial uses in a park-like setting, with permitted uses very similar to the L-I district.

**I Institutional District:** Provides large institutions of education, government, and health care, in addition to park, recreation and open space uses. Includes a separate I' Private Institutional District.

### **3. Proactive Zoning**

The City regularly reviews its Zoning Ordinance, making sure that its provisions and districts still make sense in present-day Bethlehem. The City recently re-zoned a fringe area of its Commercial Business district in the Near North Side to Residential, in order to protect the existing residential character of that area, and to discourage the encroachment of commercial uses into that neighborhood.

#### ***Constraints***

##### **1. Negative Consequences of Mixed Use**

At times, mixed land uses can create conflicts. On portions of West Broad Street, Linden Street, and in other mixed use areas, older residential structures have been demolished to make way for new businesses. Often times, these new retail or office buildings do not fit well with the pre-existing urban form of the street. The two most common visual problems are excessive building setbacks, and inappropriate architectural styles, both of which contrast with surrounding older buildings with uniform setbacks. Another challenge posed by mixed use is parking conflicts. Most of the North and West Side residential neighborhoods have only on-street parking for residents. When retail and office workers commute to Bethlehem, many park in these same spaces. Permit parking and meters mitigate this problem in some areas, but in the adjacent, unregulated areas, parking shortages and conflicts are common.

## **2. Older Zoning Ordinance**

The current City of Bethlehem Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1970, and has been amended numerous times since. City officials have done an excellent job in making sure that the ordinance reflects the needs and situations of modern-day Bethlehem, while still maintaining a “backbone” of important standards. Unfortunately, this task requires constant re-wording, augmenting and deleting of content, and re-drawing of zoning district boundaries. Bethlehem’s Zoning Ordinance is ready for a complete overhaul.

## **Organizational and Funding Resources**

### *Assets*

#### **1. Active City Departments**

Many City departments have long been active in pursuing goals which are now the basis of the Elm Street Program. Important examples include the following:

- Department of Planning and Zoning strives to maintain an appropriate mix of land uses and approve only appropriate development projects.
- Department of Community and Economic Development offers the Housing Rehabilitation Program, manages Community Development Block Grant projects, and strives to attract business investment to Bethlehem.
- Departments of Public Works and Engineering maintain and determine the need for public infrastructure.
- Department of Parks and Public Properties provides and maintains a diverse array of parks and open spaces.
- Bethlehem Police Department protects the safety of City residents.
- Bethlehem Housing Authority provides housing options for low-income residents.
- Bethlehem Parking Authority strives to make sure that residents, workers, and tourists all have places to park in Center City and surrounding neighborhoods.

## **2. Continuous Pursuit of Projects**

The City of Bethlehem is proactive in its community planning efforts. The City was one of the first in the State to pursue the Elm Street Program, which was signed into existence in February 2004. In other neighborhoods, the City has initiated the South Side Greenway project and the Stefko Boulevard Corridor Study, and continues to pursue projects which adhere to its South Side Vision 2012 Plan. To fund these and other studies, the City regularly pursues grant monies from a variety of sources.

## **3. Planning Advisory Committees**

In addition to the City Department of Planning and Zoning, several advisory bodies assist the City government in ensuring that only appropriate development and redevelopment projects occur in City neighborhoods. The Bethlehem City Planning Commission reviews all development plans, making sure that they comply with the City's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance and Zoning Ordinance. For projects proposed in the Central Bethlehem Historic District, the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) advises on historic design considerations and issues "certificates of appropriateness".

## **4. Non-Profit and Community Groups**

Numerous community groups, including 501(c)(3) non-profit groups, promote and address causes that are pertinent to the Elm Street Program. Examples include the following:

- Block Watch Groups actively monitor crime and safety in their neighborhoods.
- Adopt-a-Park groups report the physical and programming needs of their green spaces to the City, and often help maintain the park grounds.
- Churches play a key role in Study Area neighborhoods by organizing community projects and providing programs for the City's youth.
- Historic Bethlehem Partnership, and its constituent groups, constantly restore, maintain, and organize activities at various historic sites throughout Bethlehem, all of which draw tourism.
- Coalition for Appropriate Transportation educates residents on bicycle riding and maintenance, and lobbies for public improvements which favor pedestrian movement, bicycle safety, and use of public transit.

## **5. Large Institutions**

Large public and private institutions have the potential to help implement Elm Street Program goals. For example, Moravian College recently provided complete funding to install traffic calming measures along Main Street in its North Campus. The Moravian Church, with regional headquarters in Center City Bethlehem, maintains a serene, pedestrian-friendly public space at Main and Church Streets. The Bethlehem Area School District maintains six public schools in Study Area neighborhoods which add to the walkability of the City.



The cost of installing traffic calming improvements along the 1200 block of Main Street was covered by Moravian College.

## **6. Major Developers**

Land development companies have made major investments in the Study Area, recognizing the marketability of Bethlehem's attractive urban areas. Adaptive re-uses of the Silk Mill and Miller Manufacturing Building in the Moravian College Neighborhood are underway. A new five-story mixed-use building is under construction at the corner of Broad and New Streets, while an 18-story mixed-use building is proposed a half-block to the west. The Moravian Village retirement community is now complete at the east end of Market Street. At the former Durkee Spice plant on 8th Avenue, a new shopping center is currently under construction.

## **7. Government Assistance**

A variety of federal, state, and county grant programs are available to help implement this Elm Street Plan, including the following:

- *Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)* - DCED funded a majority of this plan, and will continue to provide funding for projects that are proposed under this program. This funding could also pay for an Elm Street Program manager.
- *Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)* - Through its Hometown Streets and Safe Routes to School program, PennDOT can fund public improvements which increase pedestrian safety or provide alternative walking routes. PennDOT also channels funds from federal programs such as the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).
- *Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)* - Through DCNR's Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, a wide variety of park development, recreation facility improvement, and trail development projects can be funded.

- *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)* - This federal agency administers Community Development Block Grant funding for improvements in low-income areas. HUD also offers a variety of other programs for distressed areas, including HOME Investment Partnerships, Emergency Shelter Grants, Low Income Housing Preservation, Section 8 Moderate Rehabilitation, and others.
- *Lehigh and Northampton Counties* - The two counties each offer a variety of their own grants, ranging from park and recreation improvement grants to tourism enhancement grants.

These and other funding sources will be explored further in the Implementation chapter of this Plan.

### ***Constraints***

#### **1. Competing Projects**

Many legitimate community development projects compete for funding and implementation, both within the City, and across the State. The North and West Sides of Bethlehem contain neighborhoods which are generally more stable than certain South Side Bethlehem neighborhoods. This fact could stymie the allocation of funding for Study Area projects separate from the already-allocated Elm Street funds. Likewise, many cities and boroughs across Pennsylvania face similar or worse neighborhood conditions. The severity of community needs is often a major factor in the funding decisions made in Harrisburg.

#### **2. Improvement Programs Need Additional Promotion**

Many home and business owners in Bethlehem do not realize that there are numerous City programs which offer funding and assistance for improvements. The Housing Rehabilitation Program, Community Development Block Grants, and other programs administered through the Department of Community and Economic Development, may need additional publicity to reach all of the needy areas.



## Summary of Existing Assets and Constraints

The table below lists all of the aforementioned assets and constraints. The summary of these considerations is used to develop the goals and recommendations in the chapters that follow.

**Table 2**  
**SUMMARY OF EXISTING ASSETS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Topic	Assets	Constraints
Housing and Historic Preservation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wide Range of Housing Types</li> <li>2. Above Average Housing Conditions</li> <li>3. Architectural and Historic Character of Neighborhoods</li> <li>4. Historic Preservation Efforts</li> <li>5. Forward-Looking Zoning Policies</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conversion of Single-Family Homes into Apartments</li> <li>2. Absentee landlords</li> <li>3. General Maintenance Needs</li> <li>4. “Remuddling”</li> <li>5. Variances Allowing Certain Commercial Uses in Residential Zones</li> </ol>
Streetscape and Public Infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifiable Gateways</li> <li>2. Infrastructure Mostly in Good Condition</li> <li>3. Center City Improvements</li> <li>4. Five-Year Plan for Improving Public Infrastructure</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sidewalks Present Many Challenges</li> <li>2. Shortage of Trees on Many Streets</li> <li>3. Abundance of Overhead Utility Wires</li> <li>4. Street Lighting Limited</li> </ol>
Parks, Recreation and Open Space	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Variety of Parks</li> <li>2. Recent Capital Improvements</li> <li>3. Active Community Park Groups</li> <li>4. Multiple-Use Trails</li> <li>5. Undeveloped/Vacant Land for Future Parks and Trails</li> <li>6. Public and Private Institutions Open to Public</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Funding for Capital Improvements and Maintenance</li> <li>2. Need for Recreation Programs, Especially for Teens</li> <li>3. Abuse of Facilities</li> <li>4. Festivals Present Challenges</li> <li>5. Park Maintenance and Development Issues</li> </ol>
Circulation and Parking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Excellent Access from Major Highways</li> <li>2. Traffic Congestion Rare</li> <li>3. Wide Cartways Offer Potential for Improvements</li> <li>4. Parking Reserved for Residential and Commercial Uses</li> <li>5. Curb Cut Improvement Program</li> <li>6. Multiple-Use Trails</li> <li>7. Public Transportation Provided by LANTA</li> <li>8. Coalition for Appropriate Transportation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wide Streets Encourage Speeding</li> <li>2. One-Way Street Issues</li> <li>3. Traffic Signal Challenges</li> <li>4. Heavy Truck Traffic</li> <li>5. Parking Conflicts</li> <li>6. On-Street Parking Conditions Hamper Snow Removal</li> <li>7. Physical Challenges to Pedestrian Safety</li> <li>8. Some Streets Not Bicycle-Friendly</li> <li>9. Bicycle Rack Shortage</li> <li>10. Multiple-Use Path Potential Not Yet Fully Realized</li> <li>11. Transit Often Underused</li> </ol>

***City of Bethlehem Elm Street Plan for North and West Side Neighborhoods***

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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Assets</b>	<b>Constraints</b>
Economic Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strong Central Business District</li> <li>2. Smaller Business Districts Complement the CBD</li> <li>3. Locally-Owned Businesses</li> <li>4. Available Sites and Positive Climate for Redevelopment</li> <li>5. Festivals</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Smaller Business Districts Need Streetscape Enhancements</li> <li>2. Pay Parking May Deter Some Potential Business</li> <li>3. Competition with Large Chain Stores</li> <li>4. Some Basic Goods and Services in Short Supply</li> <li>5. Challenge of Redeveloping Vacant/Older Buildings</li> <li>6. Lack of Comprehensive Commercial Development Strategy</li> </ol>
Public Safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community Police Officers</li> <li>2. Block Watch Groups</li> <li>3. Rare Personal Crime</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Property Crime</li> <li>2. Drugs in Public Spaces</li> <li>3. Shortage of Teen Activities</li> <li>4. Public Safety Risk During Festivals</li> </ol>
Land Use and Zoning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mixed Uses</li> <li>2. Appropriate Zoning</li> <li>3. Proactive Zoning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negative Consequences of Mixed Use</li> <li>2. Older Zoning Ordinance</li> </ol>
Organizational and Funding Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Active City Departments</li> <li>2. Continuous Pursuit of Projects</li> <li>3. Planning Advisory Committees</li> <li>4. Non-Profit and Community Groups</li> <li>5. Large Institutions</li> <li>6. Major Developers</li> <li>7. Government Assistance</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Competing Projects</li> <li>2. Improvement Programs Need Additional Promotion</li> </ol>



Comments gathered at a well-attended community meeting on April 26, 2005 were used to help develop the goals and recommendations of this plan.

## **GOALS**

The goals of this Elm Street Plan reflect the assets and constraints identified in the previous chapter. These overall visions originate from the same public input and information gathering that was used to determine the existing conditions. The following goals are the basis of the recommendations which follow them.

### **Housing and Historic Preservation Goals**

1. Continue to provide a variety of housing options for various budgets and lifestyles.
2. Encourage home ownership.
3. Ensure that rental units are well-kept, and are located in compatible settings.
4. Provide more incentives for maintaining and enhancing the physical appearance of the City's housing stock.
5. Expand the breadth of historic preservation.
6. Encourage infill housing through the re-development of selected vacant or under-used buildings and properties.

### **Streetscape and Public Infrastructure Goals**

1. Enhance key gateways into Center City Bethlehem.
2. Provide continuous and safe sidewalks along all residential and commercial streets.
3. Increase the coverage of street trees throughout the Plan Area.
4. Minimize overhead utility wires when possible.
5. Provide sufficient, appropriate street lighting.

## **Parks, Recreation and Open Space Goals**

1. Maintain a variety of well-kept, well-designed, and sufficiently shaded neighborhood parks.
2. Pursue additional areas of open space in a variety of sizes.
3. Encourage the efforts of neighborhood park groups.
4. Provide an interconnected, well-marked network of multiple-use trails.
5. Provide additional recreation programs, especially for teens.

## **Circulation and Parking Goals**

1. Calm traffic throughout the Plan Area, especially on major arterial streets.
2. Provide ample on-street and off-street parking for residents, workers, and visitors.
3. Ensure that truck traffic is safe, lawful, and respectful of residential neighborhoods.
4. Strive for a more pedestrian-friendly Bethlehem.
5. Address the safety and parking needs of bicyclists.
6. Encourage more use of public transportation.

## **Economic Development Goals**

1. Enhance the physical attractiveness and economic drawing power of the Plan Area's smaller business districts.
2. Promote a variety of successful, locally-owned businesses.
3. Provide a more complete variety of goods and services within walking distance of all residents.

## **Public Safety Goals**

1. Continue to provide a network of community police officers and substations.
2. Encourage the efforts of block watch groups.
3. Consider the use of additional police equipment to monitor crime.
4. Provide wholesome activities targeted for children and teens.

## **Land Use and Zoning Goals**

1. Encourage more mixed land uses in appropriate areas.
2. Strengthen regulation of land use and density with an up-to-date zoning ordinance.

## **Organizational and Funding Resource Goals**

1. Establish and help fund a permanent Elm Street committee, including a manager.
2. Continue to pursue planning and implementation projects which seek to increase quality of life in Bethlehem.
3. Actively pursue grant monies from all levels of government and other sources.
4. Engage non-profit community groups in Elm Street Plan implementation.
5. Maintain dialogue with large institutions and major developers.



Between the Hill-to-Hill Bridge (foreground) and Martin Tower (background) lies Bethlehem's Near West Side neighborhood.